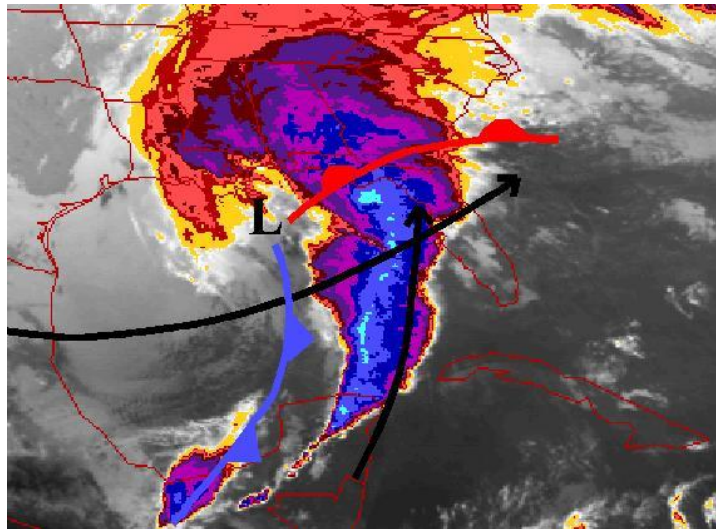


Remembering the March 1993 “Superstorm”

Today is the 19th anniversary of the infamous “Superstorm” that hit the Eastern third of the United States. This extremely powerful winter storm caused \$1.6 billion of damage in Florida, along with 28 fatalities and 150 injuries. (There were other injuries and deaths in several other states as well). It is remembered differently across the country. Those in the southern Appalachians may remember how the record snowfall was measured in feet instead of inches. North Florida residents may remember the night when 11 tornadoes and hurricane force wind gusts in a squall line killed 5 people and injured 88 others.

Closer to Tallahassee, some may recall yet another deadly aspect of this storm- the storm surge that killed 10 people in Dekle Beach and Keaton Beach. The 12 ft storm surge came early in the morning of March 13th. The massive Gulf low had been generating a large fetch of winds sustained at 60 mph or higher as it approached the northwest Florida coast. The surge height that was produced was comparable to that of a category one hurricane, except this surge affected more coastline due to the storm’s massive size.

The long fetch of storm to hurricane force winds, plus the shallow, surge-prone bathymetry of Apalachee Bay, caused a massive high tide between 5:30 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. (the time of the fatalities in Taylor County). A Keaton Beach resident (with a well-exposed anemometer about 30 ft above the ground) reported winds as high as 80 mph at the time the water was rising to its peak! As the storm center crossed near Tallahassee that morning, it set a new low pressure record (for that station) of 976 mb (or 28.82 in), beating out previous storms like Hurricane “Kate” in 1985.



IR satellite image (with superimposed surface weather map) of the “Superstorm” on March 13, 1993, as it approached Northwest FL. Image courtesy of WFO Melbourne

Written by Jeffrey D. Fournier, Senior Forecaster, using information from the NOAA NDSR “Superstorm of March 12-14, 1993”